

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

September 24, 2004

The Week Ahead

Monday, September 27

Commissioner Miller will be attending the Tennessee Correctional Association's fall training in Nashville.

Staff Contact: Andrea Turner, andrea.turner@state.tn.us

Thursday, September 30

The Commissioner will attend a community forum with Senator Larry Trail in Murfreesboro.

Staff Contact: David Braam, david.braam@state.tn.us

From the Desk of Commissioner Viola Miller

We have had a very rough couple of months. Please know that I know how difficult this has been for everyone involved. The work you do is more stressful than imaginable. You are often asked to have the Wisdom of Solomon and none of us do.

The "bad outcomes" we have had of late must be credited to instances where we have simply failed to respond, not to inadequate responses. Please keep doing the very valuable, critically important work you do with the confidence that your work will be supported. Take a moment to review what your work is...Timely assignment of all investigations...Timely investigations of all assignments...Team decision making about safety, permanency and well being of children, utilization of CFTMs and follow through. That's it.

The very worst thing we could do in response to recent events is react with fear. Our children and families deserve our timely, thoughtful, discerning investigation review and on-going decision-making. We all need to take a deep breath. We all need to take the child's perspective. We all need to remember the principles of best practice and act accordingly. Thank you for all you do every day to ensure safety, permanency and well being for our children and families.

We are seeing some glimmers of light. Our monthly contact reports are much improved. The information on timely investigations is very encouraging. Our adoptions are up and our backlogs are down. Take a moment to celebrate these accomplishments. We have a very long way to go to be the agency we want to be, but we're on our way.

I've spent the last two days with a small group of supervisors and am heartened by their commitment to our new pre-service certification program.

Please remember that we are all in this together. Major systemic change is hard work, but the results are incredibly rewarding. Our families and children deserve the best that we can be. Every day, I see evidence that DCS is committed to being the best. Let's keep our eyes on that prize. I promise you that the end result is worth it...safe, healthy, educated, growing into productive, happy adults.

CORE Leadership

Editor's Note: Minutes from the CORE Leadership Meeting that occurred on September 21, 2004, will be featured in next week's Weekly Wrap Up.

Principles to Live By

Submitted by Paul Montebello, Executive Director of Performance Enhancement

I am not my resume. If you search for me there, you won't find me. You'll find out what I do but miss who I am. I am not my resume. I am more. Here's what I believe. Here's how I try to live my life. Here's what you get, when you work with me. These are the principles by which I live.

Be thankful for every day you have. Waking up every morning is a miraculous gift. While some days are more challenging than others, there are no "bad" days. Accept the fact that you will fail, sometimes miserably. Accept that you will have times of joy, as well as sorrow. We can't help what happens to us. We can decide how we will respond to it. All of us have been given the tools from which to sculpt our lives. What we do with them is up to us.

Lead from the front. Leadership is difficult to define. A leader is part cheerleader, part critic, part teacher, and part mentor. Each of us defines the term differently. I believe that great leaders lead from the front. You cannot expect your staff to do what you will not do yourself. They look to you for guidance. If you panic, they will. If you lose confidence, they will. If you give up, they will. If you lose faith, they will. If you believe that anything is possible, they will. Leaders accept responsibility for failure. They share responsibility for success. A staff that does not have faith in you can accomplish nothing. One that trusts you is capable of anything.

Generate positive karma. I'm a Christian, but I began to read the works of the Dalai Lama several years ago. I was surprised to find similarities between Christianity and Buddhism. Both religions use different words to talk about the same concept, creating a positive life with love and respect for all creatures. Buddhists call it Karma. Christians call it the Golden Rule. I believe that each of us can be a source of enormous positive energy. I believe that we are obligated to share that energy with those around us. Good managers know how to harness positive Karma for the common welfare. People naturally desire to work in positively energized environment. They will be happier. They will be more fulfilled and committed. As a by-product, they will be better, more productive employees.

Write your own rules. Most of us carry a set of rules in our head. They were written by our parents, teachers, previous employers, etc. They are too frequently negative; can't, shouldn't, won't, don't. They are recipes for failure. Throw out the script. Use your energy to get things done. Focus on accomplishing the "impossible" and you will.

It's better to have a great team, than to have great players. I didn't make this one up. I am paraphrasing John Wooden, former coach of UCLA. Most of us can cite examples of teams with great players that failed to meet expectations. I just saw the movie "Miracle" and the rivalry between the US and USSR hockey teams in 1980 comes to mind. Exceptional managers are like exceptional coaches. They select players that work well together. They build teams that are more than just the sum of the parts. A resume doesn't tell you everything about a person. A good manager sees beyond the paper to the person. You can teach skills. You cannot teach character, motivation, desire or integrity. You have to look for them.

Empower your staff. Assuming that you followed the preceding rule, you've built a capable team that you trust. Next, turn them loose to do exceptional work. Generally, you will get what you expect. Let them try new things. Let them help one another. Let them fail. Let them succeed. They will learn more from the process than from your telling them what to do. Step in only when absolutely necessary.

Thank the piano player. No one achieves his goals alone. Behind every Russell Crowe, there is an army of managers, writers, photographers, stuntmen, make-up artists, etc. Give them the credit they deserve. Thank the people around you for their hard work. This includes people who clean the building, empty the trash and keep your day organized. Though they are mostly invisible, don't pass them by without acknowledging their contribution to your work. You will feel better for it.

Make life and work a cooperative game. The best course I ever took in graduate school was **Game Theory**. Game theory offers a scientific approach to the study of social interaction. It divides interactions into competitive and cooperative games. The premise of a competitive game is that the winner wins what the loser loses. Monopoly, for example is a competitive game. Competitive games are fun to play around the dinner table. They fail miserably in the workplace. They generate rivalries that do not further the work on the organization. They pull people in different directions as they jockey for power and position. When you play competitive games, someone must lose. Competitive games often generate anger and resentment in the workplace. When you play cooperative games, everyone wins.

Keep your eye on the prize. Most of us fail to articulate our goals. As a result, we wander with no clear destination. We fail to distinguish between wants and needs. We enter into relationships that are bad for us. We have jobs that don't satisfy us emotionally. We board the bus going to New York, when we want to be in Las Vegas. Know where you want to go and go there. It's not always easy. It's not always straightforward. Sometimes you won't get there, no matter how hard you try, but one thing is certain. Half the task of getting somewhere is knowing where you want to go.

Enjoy the ride. Life is surprisingly short and there are no replays. Strap yourself in and enjoy the experience. There is no ice cream in heaven.

Legal Team Changes with DCS

Submitted by Steven Hornsby, General Counsel

By now, I'm sure that most all of you are well aware that DCS is undergoing dramatic changes. The Central Office has been reorganized and that process is continuing. New leadership has been appointed in all of the top tier executive positions.

Word is going out to the regions in clear, unequivocal language that we must get better - and quickly - at achieving positive outcomes for children and families. We must make decisions that protect children and preserve families to the greatest extent possible. We must improve our level of professionalism and we must partner well with the other stakeholders and agencies with whom we interact. Above all, we must hold ourselves accountable to all who we serve and with whom we serve. We must be creative and bold as we move forward; and, rather than fearing change, we must recognize that each improvement made is a step toward a world-class child welfare agency.

It will be journey of years, not weeks, but each week will bring both successes and learning opportunities that will move us forward toward a seamless system of providing safety, permanence, and improved well-being for our children, our families and our communities.

The Legal Division is no exception to this mission. We have adopted as our goal, and our ONLY goal, to become the best legal division of a child welfare agency in the country. We have concluded our evaluation process, which included a re-examination of our role within the agency as well as with the judiciary, the bar and other entities with whom we interact. In so doing, we realize that our role within the agency needs to be refocused so that we assume more of the traditional roles that have existed between attorneys and clients. This will require the DCS attorney to rely on program staff's familiarity with the child and family and their respective strengths and weaknesses for programmatic decision-making purposes.

The attorney will analyze the facts of the case with a view toward what will be required to sustain the burden of proof in court, what evidence is properly admissible and what defense will likely be presented by the opposition. Program and legal staff will then engage in a decision making process about what should be the best outcome for the child and family from a legal standpoint. It is at this point when legal staff must step up and fulfill their duties to their clients by providing truly objective, unbiased, critical analysis of the case and then rendering valuable advice and counsel. Failure to do otherwise violates our creed as an attorney and disserves our client.

Obviously, program and legal staff will not always agree and what we are lacking in our present system is a methodical, predictable and professional way to resolve these conflicts. We must create a conflict resolution system that will define how these disagreements are addressed and how and when immediate supervisors and chain of command will be involved. And, it must be done so that each party feels that they have been treated with dignity and respect and that no one has "pulled rank." It must provide for specific timeframes so that cases do not fall between the cracks. The outcome should be a well-examined and well-reasoned case. As well, it will prevent conflicts from showing up in court and jeopardizing the case and everyone's hard work.

There are many other areas that we want to improve, such as having a more systematic way of adequately preparing case managers for trial, helping to assure timely adherence to ASFA deadlines, creating and maintaining open lines of communication with program staff for advise on all legal matters, including changes in the law and, most importantly, making sure that whenever DCS staff are required to appear in court their attorney is there to represent them. And doing all of this with an attitude of professionalism, courtesy and dignity.

As I said, this is going to take time, but we are committed to giving you the best legal representation possible. I look forward to the weeks and years to come and the opportunities for success that await us. I hope you share my enthusiasm.

Summertime Slim Down Update

Editor's Note: Summertime Slimdown will resume next week.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Planning visits in Hamilton, Southeast, and Davidson regions have revealed some exciting plans in the works for implementing continuous quality improvement. All three regions are already developing structures for their CQI teams. Davidson has a team in place and has developed plans for integrating CQI into every group in the region. Additional regional visits are planned for September and October as follows:

✱ Knox Region	September 24, 2004
✱ Shelby Region	September 27, 2004
✱ South Central Region	October 4, 2004
✱ East Tennessee Region	October 8, 2004
✱ Southwest Region	October 13, 2004
✱ Northwest Region	October 14, 2004
✱ Northeast Region	October 20, 2004

CQI Training

Several regions have tentative plans for CQI training. Southeast is considering a CQI Kick Off for case managers and other key stakeholders while Southwest is considering holding a CQI Pep Rally. Northeast is kicking CQI off during their Annual Fall Picnic on October 15—it promises to be an exciting day!

Plans are also underway to introduce CQI to Central Office, DCS Group Homes and Youth Development Centers, Community Service Agencies, and other key stakeholders, with Kick Offs tentatively planned for early November. A few Central Office groups—Legal, Permanency, Well-Being—have already requested meetings to learn more about how CQI principles and practices can be integrated into their work.

CQI Champions

Knox has had great success with its IV-E penetration rate, achieving a rate of 60%! News from the region revealed that shared problem-solving, supportive leadership, cross-disciplinary collaboration, strong teamwork, and committed internal and external stakeholders—all critical components of successful quality improvement—were instrumental in helping the region to succeed. Notably, the Knox County Judge, the DCS attorney, Susan Kovac, and the Court Liaison were all named as important partners in the region's success as were the CWBCs and the home county case managers. Congratulations to Knox Region!

CQI News

Marsha Blevins—an expert on records management from Kentucky—visited DCS on September 23 to work with Upper Cumberland, Southwest, and Hamilton Regions on techniques for closing files as well as for organizing and managing case file documentation. The techniques, which will be piloted by these regions, will be introduced statewide to provide for more efficient records management, which will, in turn, facilitate more effective social work practice throughout Tennessee.

TennCare Consumer Advocates are interested in the CQI initiative at DCS, so Mary Beth Franklyn—a Blue Ribbon Team member—is organizing an informational meeting with the advocates on DCS CQI.

Ted Slifer, DSW, is the newest member of the DCS QA/CQI Division. Welcome, Ted! More information about Ted and other Central Office and regional CQI staff will be coming to the CQI Column soon!

Remember, if you have any CQI news you'd like to share, please send an email to Daryl Chansuthus at daryl.chansuthus@state.tn.us. We'd love to celebrate your successes here as well as share your lessons learned. If there are particular members of your staff whose improvement efforts you would like recognize here, please let Daryl know!

DCS Community CQI Notes

Within Central Office and throughout the Regions, one topic of concern continues to emerge—the lack of timely communication. The reason for this concern is the long delay in receiving responses to email messages.

Most of us are inundated on a daily basis with email messages. Answering them all in a day that is already filled with back-to-back tasks, meetings, or visits is a true challenge. However, as we strive to build community and commitment to change, replying to messages in a timely manner is critical—even if the response is only a few short words acknowledging receipt and providing a date by which a more substantive reply can be expected. This will send the message that communication across levels, disciplines, and functions is valued and encouraged.

Andrea Walks for Tennessee's Children



Have you walked with First Lady Andrea Conte? If so, we want to know about it! Please e-mail Andrea Turner with details.

www.active.com/event_detail.cfm?event_id=1149520

Bulletin Board

Race For the Cure Sign-Up

Knox County CSA along with the Department of Children's Services is signing up for the Race for the Cure to benefit Breast Cancer Research. Many employees of both KCCSA and DCS have been affected by this disease and want to be involved in finding a cure. The race will be in downtown Knoxville on October 9th. The cost is \$22.00 per person. The deadline to sign up is Monday September 27th. If you want more information you can go to their website at: www.knoxvillraceforthecure.com or contact Amy Prince-McFall at 865-594-7091 E 138.

Upper Cumberland CSA Installs New Officers

Officers for the 2004-05 Board of Directors of the Upper Cumberland Community Services Agency were installed at their Annual Dinner Meeting held recently. The keynote speaker was Audrey Corder, Executive Director of the Office of Family and Child Well-Being with the Tennessee State Department of Children's Services. The UCCSA, under the umbrella of DCS, contracts with the department for case management services. The Upperman High School Speech and Drama team provided the entertainment.



Pictured here are new board officers and DCS representatives; (l to r) Jean McFall, board member from White County and newly elected Vice-Chair; Audrey Corder, keynote speaker with DCS; Carolyn Fox, board member from Jackson county and newly elected Secretary; Glennis Bassi, board member from Warren county and newly elected Board Chairperson; Lillian Fox, Cumberland county board member and outgoing chair; Sandra Jordan, Acting Regional Administrator for the Upper Cumberland DCS, Beth Kasch, Executive Director of the Office of Child Safety with DCS and Sue Pilson, Executive Director of the UCCSA.



I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

- Helen Keller

Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy, and mutual valuing.

- Rollo May
